

# BAHRAIN

*Issued by the "Bahrain Freedom Movement" to promote human and constitutional rights*

## More killings by a rogue regime that must be resisted and changed

Another hectic year in the life of the people of Bahrain has passed with varying episodes of struggle, grief and martyrdom. But one solid fact has remained. There is no diminishing of the their resolve to achieve a democratic political system despite the oppression and terror unleashed by the ruling Al Khalifa family. What has added salt to the injury in the latest clashes last month is the appearance of a militia attached to the defunct regime in Iraq, commonly known as "Saddam's fedayeen (those who are ready to sacrifice themselves to defend Saddam! Their presence on many occasions was intended to create fear among the demonstrators. But this act may have rebound against the ruling family. Some electronic sites have published long lists of names of members of this group and there has been angry reaction among Iraqis who have now realised that the ruling family in Bahrain has sheltered two groups; Saddam soldiers and members of other active terrorist groups in Iraq.

The political scene in Bahrain is thus becoming more complex and extremely dangerous. The situation is fast reaching the point of no return in the relations between the ruling family and the people. The martyrdom on 17th December of a young Bahraini in the hands of members of Sheikh Hamad's death squads has added more complication to an already charged atmosphere. Ali Jassim Makki, 31, was butchered to death as he took part in a peaceful demonstration to mark the Day of Martyrs. It was on 17th December 1994 when the ruling family ordered heavily-armed troops to fire on demonstrators. The first two martyrs fell on that day. Since then, the people have commemorated the occasion with peaceful demonstrations, visits to the graves of the martyrs and oratory congregations and seminars. This year was no exception. The events took a new turn as it became apparent that the ruler, Sheikh Hamad, appeared to have given his personal orders to kill Bahraini demonstrators. The situation erupted in an instantaneous uprising spreading to many parts of the country. People were attacked in the streets by death squads and Saddam's squads,

homes smashed, mosques raided and women beaten up with extreme savagery. If anything of the Al Khalifa's form of democracy had survived earlier demonstrations and protests, the remnants of Sheikh Hamad's "reforms programme" has this time been obliterated. The new year dawns on Bahrain with heavily clouded skylines. The blood of the martyrs has coloured the horizon while the weeping of widows, the cries of the injured and the pleas of the prisoners of conscience have echoed in the various corners of the country. The coverage by international media of the events of the past month have helped expose the realities of the hereditary dictatorship ruling over Bahrain with extreme forms of tyranny and savagery. Activists have gone on hunger strikes, the youth are becoming more militant as they see themselves squeezed between the unescapable plight of joblessness and poverty and the terror machine of the Al Khalifa rulers. Sheikh Hamad's policies have helped to mobilise more people on the streets. The failure of the "parliamentary" experiment, even after the participation of some groups who had boycotted it earlier, has now become fuel for tension and wider opposition. Sheikh Hamad's shura council (with its appointed and elected members) has failed to convince the people of its viability as a channel to democracy. Those who joined it in the past year have failed to make the slightest change to its policies, methods of operations or its ultimate aim of institutionalising oppression and dictatorship. When the ruling family decided to get moral support from the council, it encountered no difficulty in achieving what it wanted. A statement was issued by the council against the people of Bahrain, with swearing and accusations against the pro-democracy activists.

The new year has thus dawned with new realities, hopes and concerns. With Bahrain due to be scrutinised for its dismal human rights records by the UN Human Rights Council, there is abundance of evidence of gross human rights violations especially the administering of

torture, arbitrary detention, collective punishment, and denial of basic rights. What is more serious is the policy of ethnic cleansing being implemented at grand scale by Sheikh Hamad. Despite the disclosures by Al Bandar report of the secret web in charge of implementing the programme of ethnic cleansing, the ruling family has refused to discuss its contents or bring those responsible for its implementation to justice. Both Khalid bin Ahmad Al Khalifa, the minister of the royal court (who is a notorious sectarianist), and Ahmad Atiyyat Allah Al Khalifa, are sheltered by Sheikh Hamad and his death squads not only from prosecution, but also from questioning and interrogation. The public feelings are thus fuelled continuously by these policies, and the blatant attempts to brush aside the people's concerns, fears and anger. The only avenue that remains open is the open-ended struggle to achieve real change in the political realities of the country. The Al Khalifa family had invaded the country, occupied it by force and forced unpleasant regime on the people. They are plundering its wealth, lands and resources at an unprecedented scale. They are abusing the basic human rights and dignity of the people. Despite the civilised manner of opposition and demands, the Al Khalifa have relied on the use of force as the main weapon to crush the opposition. It is time that an all-out change is sought. Sheikh Hamad had show a serious lack of appreciation of public sentiments not only in Bahrain but in the world, when he changed the country into a kingdom, imposed tighter Al Khalifa hegemony, imposed his own constitution and started his ethnic cleansing programme. He has left no room for negotiation with the people of Bahrain, and is clearly intent on fundamental changes to the human, geographical and political landscape of Bahrain. This must be resisted at all levels and by all people of principles and values. The new year has brought with it new realities and the Bahraini opposition is poised for serious shifts in its demands, tactics and means. The Al Khalifa is an evil that has to be eradicated. The international community has a role to play in this struggle; it must not hesitate to take action against this rogue regime.

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## New martyr on the way to freedom

Ali Jassim, 31 was taking part in a peaceful demonstration today, on the Day of Martyrs, when he was mercilessly attacked by members of the Al Khalifa Death Squads. He was left for dead. His family took him to the hospital. But it was too late. Ali Jassim was murdered by these vicious troops who have been instructed to maim or kill Bahrainis.

Sheikh Hamad bin Isa Al Khalifa, has now entered the books of history as one of the most vicious dictators of the Middle East. Few months ago, a young man, Abbas Al Shakhouri, was killed by his death squads. No one has been arrested or charged for his murder. Two other young men were also murdered by Hamad's killers; Mahdi Abdul Rahman (July 2006) and ohammad Juma' Al Shakhouri (2001). The last martyr of the intifada, Nooh Khalil Al Nooh, was killed by Hamad's death squads. In none of these cases the killers were either arrested or tried. In 2002, Sheikh Hamad issued his notorious Law 56 that decreed impunity to killers and torturers.

Today's murder happened on a day of enormous activities in most parts of the country. The people were commemorating the Day of the Martyrs to mark the day when in 1994 the prime minister, Sheikh Hamad bin Isa Al Khalifa, gave orders to the security forces and riot police to use live ammunition against peaceful demonstrators. Two Bahrainis were killed; Hani

Khamis and Hani Al Wasti. Since then the people have commemorated 17th December as the Days of the Martyrs. This year, however, the activities dominated the whole country. The activities started last week when the people commemorated the first anniversary of the demise of Sheikh Abdul Amir Al Jamri. On Thursday night 13th December, the security and riot forces attacked a peaceful demonstration wounding and arresting several young men. In many villages, the people declared their intention to take part in today's demonstrations and pickets. The walls in Al Malikiyya, Karzakkan, Sitra, Al Ekr, Sanabis, Jidhaf and Duraz were covered with anti-regime slogans. Coupled with several pickets by the unemployed over the past few weeks, the situation has become volatile. What made the situation worse, has been the interview that the prime minister, Sheikh Khalifa bin Salman Al Khalifa gave to the Kuwaiti, Al Siyassa, in which he stood by his repressive policies of the nineties and said that he was ready to use the same policies again. The absence of any sign of remorse convinced the people that they were dealing with a monster whose thirst for blood has no bounds.

The cold-blooded killing of Ali Jassim has turned the country into a political inferno. Bahrain is now bracing itself to a winter of fury as the people of Bahrain have become more blatant in their rejection of the Al

Khalifa rulers who have occupied their land and enslaved them for so long. There are now voices calling for an end to this bloody and black era. Calls have been made to the United Nations to intervene in support of the people of Bahrain especially in the light of the continued demographic transformation being implemented by Sheikh Hamad and his clique.

Today's events have overshadowed other events such as the crackdown against demonstrators in many parts of the country, the arrest and torture of many youth and the maltreatment of detainees. One young man, Sayyed Ahmad from Sanabis, was subjected to horrific treatment last week for taking part in a peaceful demonstration in his town.

During his interrogation at the torture chambers, he was repeatedly beaten on the same wounds sustained during the demonstration. When he complained to the prosecution, he was told the police were acting in self-defence. This lack of any respect of human rights has caused enormous distress among human rights activists. Today's events have also caused distress to many. Those who saw the martyr, Ali Jassim, during his post-mortem, were horrified by the extent of his injuries.

Photos were taken of the body of this young and healthy young man. The injuries reflected deep enmity and lack of respect of the human soul, and is likely to lead to more protests and demonstrations by the people.

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## Tension mounts as Bahrainis mourn their martyr

It was a most noticeable day in the life of Bahrain. The people's fury could not have been clearer and more robust. Yesterday (19th December) was the last day of the commemoration ceremony of the latest martyr, Ali Jassim, who had been murdered on Monday, 17th December by the Al Khalifa police. He was taking part in a peaceful demonstration on the Day of Martyrs. The horrific wounds he sustained at the hands of the mercenaries had shocked the community led to calls for an immediate impartial investigation. The ruling family has refused to investigate the crime. At no time in its black history did it investigate the tens of murders committed by its forces against the people of Bahrain. To make the situation more grave, Sheikh Hamad had violated the international Convention Against Torture and issued the notorious decree 56 to protect torturers and human rights abusers.

Yesterday, thousands of people flocked to the martyrs grave to pay their last respects. They then went on a peaceful demonstration to demand an inquiry into the crime. The demonstrations were concentrated in the areas near Abdul Karim Roundabout, the Al Hashimi Mall, Jiyan Mall and Sanabis. Instead of heeding the people's call, the royal family ordered a vicious attack against the demonstrators, causing injuries and arresting scores of Bahrainis. The people reacted angrily and

waged an attack against the aggressors, causing them to flee the scene. A police vehicle was later set on fire by angry demonstrators.

Sheikh Hamad and his clique ordered an immediate collective punishment of several areas, including Jidhafs, Daih and Sanabis. The skirmishes between the people and the aggressors continued until late hours of the night. For the following three hours, the mercenaries wreaked havoc in those areas, attacking women congregation halls, mosques and houses. There were frightening scenes throughout. Several people needed treatment for their wounds or excessive gas inhalation. A foreign journalist who was in the area described it as resembling the Israeli attacks on Palestinian areas. The photos published in websites gave a grave image of the situation. It could well be the beginning of a new, and possibly, a decisive one between the people of Bahrain and the Al Khalifa occupiers.

Meanwhile, the Haq Movement has taken more steps in its Civil Resistance campaign against the regime. Its Secretary General, Hassan Mushaime, cut short his trip to UK to attend a seminar at the House of Lords, and returned to Bahrain to take part in the commemoration of the martyr, Ali Jassim. He flew back to Manama on Tuesday night. Three other senior members of Haq followed him two days later. This morning, Mr Isa Al Jowdar, Dr Abdul Jalil Al Sin-

gace and Mrs Laila Dashti, took a Gulf Air flight back to Bahrain to take part in a new campaign within the Civil Resistance activities by their movement. They had taken part in the House of Lords seminar on Wednesday and were scheduled to attend a gathering by Bahraini community in UK over the weekend. Due to the gravity of the situation, they returned to Bahrain to take part in the planned activities.

Preparations were underway for the undeclared new campaign, and fears are mounting of a possible retaliatory violence by the Al Khalifa regime. The situation is escalating despite efforts by pro-regime groups to passify people's anger.

The House of Lords seminar was held, as planned, on Wednesday, and was attended by human rights organizations, politicians and supporters of the people of Bahrain. Mercenaries working for the Al Khalifa hereditary dictatorship were also present. Among them was an employee of the Policy Partnership group, owned by Lord Guilford. He took an active role in challenging the Bahrainis who were picketing the reception organized by the Bahraini embassy in London on Thursday 13<sup>th</sup> December. The seminar was covered by prominent TV satellite channels such as Al Jazeera, Press TV and Al Aalam. It was a successful event praised by attendants who became more aware of the true situation in Bahrain.

## International support to Mr. Mohamed Al-Maskati

The Observatory for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders, a joint programme of the World Organisation Against Torture (OMCT) and the International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH), requests your urgent intervention in the following situation in Bahrain.

### Brief description of the situation :

The Observatory has been informed by the Bahrain Centre for Human Rights (BCHR) about the judicial proceedings against Mr. Mohamed Abdul Nabi Al-Maskati, Director of the Bahrain Youth Society for Human Rights (BYSHR), which organises training workshops, monitors and documents human rights violations and participates in forming a regional network for young human rights activists in eight Arab countries.

According to the information received, on November 27, 2007, Mr. Al-Maskati was tried by the Fourth Degree Minor Criminal Court, upon charges of "activating unregistered association before issuing the declaration of registration".

These charges are linked to the fact that BYSHR failed to get registered because of the restricting procedures included in the Bahraini Penal Code of 1976 and Association Law of 1989, which pose conditions to the registration of NGOs, among which the approval by the authorities, the forbidding of handling political issues and the fact that all members should be older than 18 years old. According to these laws, the sentence incurred by Mr. Al-Maskati is six months of prison and a 5,000 dinars fee.

Prior to this trial, the members of BYSHR had received a notification by the Ministry of Social Affairs requesting them to stop their activities or they will



be prosecuted. BYSHR had filed for registration in June 2005 and has since then never received any answer from the authorities.

The hearing has finally been reported to January 21, 2008.

The Observatory is preoccupied by these judicial proceedings against Mr. Al-Maskati engaged in accordance with legislative measures which illustrate a determination to control and silence independent organisations, and to limit the presence of NGOs on Bahraini territory.

### Actions requested :

Please write to the authorities of Bahrain urging them to :

i. Put an end to all forms of harassment, including at the judicial level, against Mr. Mohamed Abdul Nabi Al-Maskati and all members of the Bahrain Youth Society for Human Rights, and ensure in all circumstances that its members are able to carry out their work freely without any hindrances;

ii. Put an end to all forms of harassment against human rights defenders in Bahrain;

iii. Conform with the provisions of the UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders, adopted by the General Assembly of the United Nations on December 9, 1998, in particular its Article 1, which provides that "everyone has the right, individually and in association with others, to promote and to strive for the protection and realisation of human rights and fundamental freedoms at the national and international levels",

Article 11, which states that "everyone has the right, individually and in association with others, to the lawful exercise of his or her occupation or profession", as well as Article 12(1) that provides "everyone has the right, individually and in association with others,

to participate in peaceful activities against violations of human rights and fundamental freedoms";

iv. Ensure in all circumstances respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms in accordance with international human rights standards and international instruments ratified by Bahrain.

### Martyr Ali Jassim Mohammad

Ali Jassim Mohammad, 31, was butchered to death by the Al Khalifa killers on 17th December. He was taking part in a peaceful demonstration to commemorate the Day of the Martyrs. His body exhibited marks of extreme forms of torture. The ruling family has refused to form an independent inquiry into the crime. Bahrain erupted in anger as the news spread.



## Hunger strikers plan petition against PM

In a closing statement, a group of dignitaries and activists ended this evening a protest hunger strike holding the authorities in Bahrain, especially the Prime Minister, the responsibility in the current security, economic and the political crisis and situation in the country, sparked by the recent killing of the Bahraini activist, Ali Jasem because of the excessive use of force by security authorities to prevent a march demanding truth and justice for the victims of repression and torture in the previous era.

As per the statement "in support to the growing demands for disqualification of the Prime Minister, and all of those involved with him in the responsibility of the human rights violations in the country, and bring them to justice". A popular petition will be launched calling for stepping down of the Prime Minister, such that the new government enjoys popular acceptance, and independent from the ruling family, to ensure its accountability. Otherwise, no remedy is secured for victims of the regime practices

in its former and current status. Furthermore, legislations could not be reformed, human rights violations could not be stopped, truth regarding corruption and misappropriation of lands could not be exposed, the settlement and changing demography program, locally known as political naturalization, and the killing crimes suffered by citizens, the last of the which is Ali Jassim.

The statement was narrated by secretary general of HAQ Movement, in Al-Sadeq mosque in the capital Manama. The hunger struggle, which lasted for three days, was carried out, in addition to the Secretary-General of HAQ, Hasan Jasem Mohammed (brother of the martyr Ali Jasem), Abdulhadi Al-Khawaja (President of the Bahrain Center for Human Rights), Sheikh Abdulhadi Almokhadher (scholar), Sheikh Issa Al-Jowder (cleric and political activist), Dr Abduljalil Alsingace (Media Director of HAQ- Movement), Layla Dashti (political and human rights activist) and a group of young activists.

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justify interrogation and prosecution not only of journalists but even bloggers and website administrators.

It seems that no further progress towards freedom and democracy can be expected, and we have entered what the title of our seminar describes as a post-reforms era, when the hopes that were raised by the present ruler when he inherited, are dashed, and people must either knuckle under to the dictatorship or take new initiatives of their own to seize their rights. Let us appeal to the Human Rights Council, from this meeting, to take this issue very seriously, when they consider Bahrain's record in a few weeks' time. The rising tensions we see in Bahrain at the end of 2007 can only be defused if the people can get robust support from the United Nations for their legitimate aspirations.

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## Lord Avebury: Negative developments in 2007

A year ago our theme was 'elections without democracy or human rights'. We noted that in Bahrain, there is a pretence of democracy whilst all the sinews of government are bent to maintaining the absolute rule of the al-Khalifa family, with the assistance of others who benefit financially from the regime.

Twelve months later, the people are still powerless, but there is a growing sense of resentment and a feeling that with no sign of progress towards equality, the rule of law, democracy and human rights, the situation is likely to become unstable.

Some people who don't belong to the exclusive Sunni tribe who hold all the political power have become very rich by collaboration and are dependable supporters of the status quo.

Foreign immigrants have been and still are being granted citizenship and jobs, gradually marginalising the native people and driving most of them downwards into poverty.

The king and members of his family have taken control of several large islands including those regained by Bahrain through a decision of the international court. That annexation showed clearly that King Hamad regards the state of Bahrain as his personal property. He and his uncle the Prime Minister have also enriched themselves by the sale of valuable land reclaimed from the shallow sea adjacent to the capital, Manama. To quote from Property Development World:

"The Two Seas development is the creation of a luxury waterfront community located across eleven million square meters of man-made island which will offer investors and potential residents the chance to own freehold property in Bahrain within a district dominated by state of the art homes, recreational, retail and commercial space and an expanse of manicured and landscaped gardens".

It is the ruling family that controls reclamation, though of course the process is opaque, like the rest of the royal accounts.

Nobody demands that the King's finances be open to public scrutiny, still less that they should be subject to Parliamentary control as they would be in a proper democracy. It's a taboo subject.

So is the endemic discrimination against the Shi'a, who still form the majority of the population, though not for much longer. The strategy of the al-Khalifas is to continue with their demographic engineering until the Shi'a can be outvoted, so that the inequality of wealth and incomes, of opportunity, and of political power, can be maintained even in free and fair elections.

In the meanwhile, elections change nothing. After the last Parliamentary elections in 2006 the king reappointed the Prime Minister, who has now held that office continually for 37 years, and a cabinet half the members of which also belonged to the al-Khalifa family. The relatives occupied most of the important portfolios such as defence.

This incestuous system leads to corruption and skulduggery of the sort described by De Salah al Bander, a British citizen who

worked for the government until he blew the whistle and was expelled. He exposed Sheikh Ahmed bin Atiyatalla Al Khalifa – a minister and relative – as the centre of a multi-billion Dinar conspiracy to manipulate the elections, foment sectarian distrust, and to keep the Shi'as down. These criminal activities are tolerated by the government to this day as far as we know.

The authorities couldn't rebut the 200 pages of evidence Dr al-Bander published, so they tried to blacken his name. The accused Sheikh Ahmed is still a 'key minister' according to The Economist.

The allegations made by Dr al-Bander, like every other report of misconduct by the al-Khalifa such as the land grab, can't be discussed by the media in Bahrain.

Among other recent examples of censorship was the instruction to the media not to report anything said by the woman activist Ms Ghada Jamsheer. She had criticised the Supreme Council of Women, chaired by the King's wife, for its failure to promote women's rights and its steadfast loyalty to the government.

Bahrain acceded to the CEDAW in July 2002 and was due to submit its first report in July 2003. So its now over four years overdue, and the second report is also late.

But now at least, Bahrain is due to answer to the UN Human Rights Council next February, under the new procedure for review of member states. Key features of the procedure are that a State has to prepare the information through a broad national consultation process and the High Commissioner for Human Rights has to compile a summary of the State's compliance with the human rights treaties including the CEDAW.

Bahrain will have to explain why it hasn't reported, and why the king's wife is considered to be a suitable person to head the women's rights body, when she is unlikely to call her husband's government to account.

It remains to be seen whether the consultation required will include bodies such as the Bahrain Center for Human Rights, or the Bahrain Youth Society for Human Rights, whose leader Mr Mohammed Al Maskati is due in court on January 21, charged with operating an unregistered society. He says the charge is a violation of Article 19 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, which Bahrain has ratified.

I challenge civil society in Bahrain to put together their own report for the Human Rights Council. The National Committee for Martyrs and Victims of Torture could write a note on the continued violation of the government's obligations under the Convention Against Torture, drawing attention to the excellent report by Redress that we discussed last year. The BCHR could draw attention to the death of Mr Ali Jassim al-Barbari, a young bus driver, only recently married, following a demonstration on Tuesday, a tragic echo on the eve of Martyrs Day of the two who were killed on

December 17, 23 years ago. It was said that he had been overcome by teargas, but he hadn't previously had any respiratory problems that would have made him particularly vulnerable.

Abdul-Hadi al-Khawaja, the head of the Bahrain Center for Human Rights who was at the morgue said that bruises could be seen over Jassim's dead body. And Jassim is not the first unexplained death. The Human Rights Council should be provided with a summary of the many others over the years, to enable them to consider whether the right to life, the most fundamental right of all, is protected in Bahrain.

The Special Forces, largely recruited from other countries had been using excessive force against demonstrators over the last weeks, injuring several people by firing rubber bullets at them from close range and beating up demonstrators, some of them children. Bahrain ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child in 1992 and took 6½ years to submit its initial report. Exceptionally, it was given until March 2004 to submit its second and third reports, but they haven't yet appeared nearly four years later. Evidently Bahrain wishes to be thought of as a state where human rights are respected, but doesn't have any real intention of complying with standard international norms.

Yesterday was International Migrants Day and Louise Arbour, the High Commissioner for Human Rights, issued a statement condemning "Working conditions that amount to modern forms of slavery, such as long working hours, payment of salaries well below minimum wage established by law, exposure to degrading and dangerous working conditions and confiscation of travel documents".

She could have been thinking of Bahrain. Those who complain get sacked, like the 50 migrant workers who went on strike against low wages at a Saudi-owned dairy. And its reported that so far this year alone, tens of thousands have been deported without a hearing.

Finally, the attention of the Human Rights Council should be drawn to the report on Bahrain last month from the freedom of expression NGO Article 19. They talk about the recent crackdown, including the banning of books and films, the blocking of websites, and the prosecution of individuals, such as writers and journalists, for exercising their right to free expression.. This year so far 32 cases have been filed against journalists; two writers have been refused leave to publish academic book; several films have been banned; at least 22 websites, including the site of the Bahrain Center for Human Rights and the Arabic Network for Human Rights Information, have been blocked by Batelco, the only Internet Service Provider in the country, owned by the Bahraini government.

The 2002 Press and Publication Law, and the 1976 Penal Code have been used in

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